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School-Wide Strategies for Managing... STUDY SKILLS / ORGANIZATION



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As students transition to middle and high school, they are expected to depend less on the teacher to manage their instruction and to put increasing energy into becoming self-managing learners. But students must master essential study and organizational skills before they can function as independent learners. Individuals with strong study and organization skills are able to break class and homework assignments into subtasks and use time efficiently to complete those assignments, save and store graded papers and handouts for later retrieval, regularly review class notes and course readings, and practice effective study techniques. Instructors can accelerate the development of students into self-managing learners by explicitly teaching and evaluating study and organization skills and by delivering structured lessons that students can easily follow and capture in notes. Here are a range of ideas that can assist students to study more effectively and become more organized:

- Independent Work. Create Customized 'Common Mistakes' Checklists** (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Students can develop an individualized checklist of the kinds of errors that they commonly commit on independent assignments and use this checklist to reduce or eliminate mistakes before turning in those assignments. As a class exercise, give several examples to your students of common mistakes that you find on their assignments (e.g., failure to show all work on math problems; incomplete entries on term-paper outlines). Next, have the class brainstorm a list of mistakes that they are most likely to make. Then direct each student to review the class list and create a customized checklist by selecting the 4-5 mistakes that he or she is most likely to commit. Direct students to keep their customized error checklists and use them to review their assignments before turning in.
- Independent Work: Assign an Adult Advisor** (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Struggling students will do a better job of managing their many academic work and study requirements when they can have informal weekly meetings with an adult advisor. The advisor can be any school staff member who has a good relationship with the student. The role of the advisor is to communicate with other members of the student's team to ensure that the student is caught up with all homework and classwork assignments and is doing a satisfactory job of preparing for tests and quizzes. The advisor should plan to meet with the student at a fixed time at the start of each week for a brief meeting (1) to review academic progress, (2) help the student to get organized for upcoming assignments and prepare for tests, and (3) provide the student with encouragement and 'mini-skills' lessons in organization and study skills as needed.
- Independent Work: Have Students Break Larger Tasks into Smaller Sub-Tasks** (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Students who easily become overwhelmed when given a large assignment can do independently can boost their confidence when taught first to break that assignment down into smaller, more manageable sub-tasks. Select an upcoming assignment that students are expected to complete on their own (e.g., term paper, homework assignment with multiple math problems). Demonstrate for the class or to the individual student how to partition the larger assignment into smaller steps or 'chunks'. Have the student(s) complete the assignment independently, one sub-task at a time, using your work plan. On the next assignment, have the student(s) subdivide the task into chunks to create their own work plan while you observe and provide feedback.
- Independent Work: Teach Students to Adapt Worksheets** (U.S. Department of Education,

Jim's Recommended Internet Resources for... STUDY SKILLS / ORGANIZATION



Dartmouth: Academic Skills. The Dartmouth Academic Skills Center offers no-nonsense tutorials in the basics of good study practices, including 'Managing Your Time', 'Reading Your Textbooks' and 'Where to Study/How to Study'. ||Report Broken Link

Prentice Hall: Academic Skills. These tip-sheets cover the core areas of study skills, including effective reading, note-taking, and preparing for tests. They are well-written and to the point. This academic skills section is part of a larger website created by Prentice Hall Publishers with tips to help college students to achieve success. ||Report Broken Link

Study Guides and Strategies. The Study Guides and Strategies web site is one of the most comprehensive of its kind on the web. The site contains brief tutorials in bullet format for easy and quick reading. It features a wide range of study- and learning-related topics such

2004). If students seem to struggle with the format of complex worksheets, teach them tricks to reduce the complexity or 'busyness' of the sheet. If students appear to become anxious or to lose their place when given a worksheet with a large number of math problems, for example, suggest that they fold the page or use a blank piece of paper to hide all problems except the one on which they are currently working. Or if a double-sided worksheet has a complex informational graphic (e.g., a map) on one side of the page and questions to be answered on the flip side of the worksheet, give the student an extra copy of that worksheet so that the student can look at the questions and the graphic at the same time.

- **Instruction: Preview & Review Lesson Objectives** (Beyda, Zentall, & Ferko, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Teachers can help students to retain the key points of a lesson by previewing the important learning objectives, labeling important points during the lesson, and reviewing those points at the close of the instructional session. Open the lesson by telling students what they will be learning that day and the materials that they will need to accomplish the lesson. During the lesson, emphasize important information that students should write into their class notes. At the end of the lesson, briefly review the central points again to improve student retention.
- **Instruction: Signal Key Words or Concepts That Will Be on the Test** (Sprick, Borgmeier, & Nolet, 2002). Teachers can improve students' motivation and boost their performance on tests by writing the examinations first and then structuring course content and review activities to help students to successfully pass these tests. The instructor constructs the test in advance so that it contains the essential elements of course content that students must master. During instruction, whenever the teacher presents to the class any concept, fact, or operation that will appear on the test, the instructor announces that 'this will be on the test' as a cue to alert students to attend closely to the information. The teacher also selects review activities that allow students to practice and master course material before they are tested on that material.
- **Study Skills: Effective Studying Requires Preparation & Follow-Through** (University of North Dakota Learning Center, n.d.). Effective study habits require that the student prepare before class to more fully understand the instructional content, attend carefully during class for clues about what facts or concepts the teacher views as most important, and quickly review notes after class to fill in any missing information and to cement understanding. In preparation for the class period, the student completes any assigned reading, and looks over notes and quickly skims the reading from the previous class session. During class, the student focuses on the instructor, listening carefully to how the instructor 'cues' the class that information is important (e.g., tone of voice, repetition, notes written on the board). If the teacher announces that a particular fact, concept, or idea will appear on a future test, the student records this information in his or her notes. Within 24 hours after class, the student reviews the class notes to help him or her to capture this course information in long-term memory. The student also uses this review opportunity to add any additional details, to reword notes to clarify their meaning, or to check with other students or the teacher to fill in any gaps in the notes.
- **Study Skills: Study Actively** (University of North Dakota Learning Center, n.d.; Wright, 2002). Students get much more out of study sessions when they use strategies to actively review the material--such as summarizing main ideas from passages, formulating possible test questions from class notes, reciting information aloud, and studying with others. When reviewing readings from the course, the student should pause after important passages to attempt to summarize the main idea, or 'gist sentence' of each passage. While reviewing class notes, the student should attempt to identify concepts or facts from the notes that are likely to appear on an upcoming quiz or test. The student then formulates a possible test question that would be answered by the selection from his or her notes. Some students also find that they retain information more effectively during review when they occasionally read aloud sections from their course readings or class notes. Studying with others is another good method for reviewing course material, as students can motivate and encourage one another during the study session.
- **Study Skills: Teach a Structured Note-Taking Process** (Pauk, 1989). Students benefit in two ways when using a highly structured note-taking process such as the Cornell System: Not only do they recall more information from lectures because they made the effort to capture it in the form of notes, but students also have a more complete set of notes to which they can refer when studying for quizzes and tests. The Cornell Notetaking System is organized into the following steps: (1) The student draws a vertical line on blank lined note paper. The line separates the page into a left-margin section that is 2.5 inches in width and another on the right that is 6 inches in width. (2) During reading or lectures, the student jots all notes in the 6-inch section of the page. (3) After leaving class or finishing the reading, the student reduces the notes into key words or key phrases. These condensed words or phrases are jotted into the 2.5-inch left margin of the page. (4) When reviewing course material, the student looks over his or her notes and jots down possible questions from the content that might appear on a test. The student then covers the notes (6-inch section of the page) and attempts to recite answers to the questions that he or she has created--using the key words or phrases in the left margin as prompts. (5) The student reviews notes periodically (e.g., 2-3 times per week), repeating the procedure outlined in step 4.
- **Study Skills: Use Student Study Schedule** (Wright, 2002). A daily study schedule can ensure that the student makes the most efficient use of study time. Each day, the student makes a written schedule for homework and study. The study schedule should also include time for leisure activities--and the student should be sure to limit leisure activities to the time allotted. A study schedule has greater weight if the student's parent(s) monitor the student's adherence to the daily schedule.

as reading, classroom participation, learning with others, and project management. The site is authored, maintained and supported by Joe Landsberger 'as an independent educational public service'. ||Report Broken Link

Virginia Tech: Study Skills Self-Help Information. Find tutorials on taking notes, managing the study environment, proofreading, writing papers and more. The site also features several self-guided 'online study skills workshops' on topics such as improving concentration and time management. The site is sponsored by the Cook Counseling Center at Virginia Polytechnic Institute. ||Report Broken Link

- **Work Materials: Organize the Backlog of Old Papers** (Sirostowitz, Davis, & Parker, 2003). Students are much better organized when they can identify old papers that should be saved for later review, have a system for labeling and filing these archived papers, and stay caught up by filing papers promptly. The teacher or parent (helping adult) first assists the student in carrying out a 'paper search', rummaging through the student's backpack, school locker, bedroom, notebook, or any other location where old papers may have collected. Next, student and helping adult sort through the pile of amassed papers, deciding which should be tossed in the trash and which should be saved. (Candidate papers to save include old tests, teacher handouts, and graded homework.) Then student and adult write at the top of each saved page the subject, the approximate date that the paper was created or handed out, and any other important identifying information (e.g., the textbook chapter or page that a series of handwritten notes were drawn from or are linked to). For each subject, label a manila folder. File all old papers for that subject in the folder, organized by date or by chapter/page number (depending on which scheme seems a more useful way to group the material). Put all folders of sorted papers into a single file cabinet drawer, crate, or other easily accessible location. Then encourage the student to sort through old papers each day and file those that are to be saved away in the appropriate folder. Also, remind the student to review the contents of folders when studying for quizzes and tests.
- **Work Materials: Schedule Regular 'Clean Outs'** (Gleason, Colvin, & Archer, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Students are most productive when they are periodically given time and guidance to organize their work- and storage spaces to better manage the 'paperflow' of school work. Prepare a class mini-lesson to present suggestions on how your students should organize their desk or other class workspace, backpack, and/or locker. Work with your class to develop organizational tips (e.g., what does belong in a locker and what does not) and a rubric to judge the degree to which each student's work- and storage spaces are appropriately organized. Schedule time periodically for the entire class or selected students to organize their work and storage spaces under your supervision. Have students refer to the class rubric and provide teacher feedback as they organize their spaces.

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Helping the LD Child with Organization

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Organization is a worthwhile life-long skill. Some people have a knack for great organization skills and some don't. Students with learning disabilities can benefit from the following strategies to help with organization.

Helping the child to develop a routine will ultimately lead to organization success. The goal for organization is to eliminate tardiness, forgetfulness, lack of preparedness and procrastination. These habits need to be eliminated and replaced with strategies to ensure the student is utilizing good organization skills. Once again, a consistent approach that is reinforced on a regular basis will be a tremendous help.

- A daily agenda or timetable should be with the student at all times during the school day and every effort should be in place to insure that it's used regularly.
- If you have extra texts, it would benefit the student to have a copy at home.
- Checklists to ensure that all steps or procedures are followed should be plain view.
- Give the student organizers - graphic organizers, checklists, subtitles, outlines etc. that assist with written work and assignments. [Sample Agenda Type List PDF](#)
- Break down all items that are to be included in assignments and provide goals to be reached and ensure that checkpoints are in place.
- Teach the child how to highlight pertinent information and take notes that are meaningful.
- Communicate regularly about progress and strategies for improvement.
- Make sure that you have a positive home-school connection with the support needed to ensure success.
- Provide verbal prompts and cues to ensure the student is prepared. For example, ask the student what needs to be done on the given night. If he answers math, ask what is needed to complete the math. Help with verbal cues often which will eventually lead to the student reflecting back on what's needed.
- Sometimes a checklist stating what needs to be done and what's needed to do it is very helpful. At the end of each day the child will ensure that both are complete.

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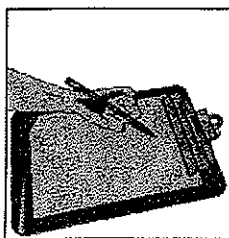
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Guided Notes

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Teachers help students to take notes more accurately and efficiently by having the class use guided notes. Guided notes are teacher-prepared handouts, or notes-templates. Like traditional notes, guided notes summarize key concepts of lecture material. A key difference, though, is that guided notes contain gaps or blanks into which the student must write key words or phrases.



Research indicates that guided notes can increase the likelihood that a student will actively engage in, and respond to, lesson content. Among other benefits, guided notes can help a student to distinguish between more important and less important lecture content, ensure that all students are studying from a standard series of lecture notes, and help to hold both instructor and students to a prepared lesson plan.

Jim's Hints for Using... Guided Notes



Accommodating Diverse Learners.

Students who have difficulty keeping up with even the modest writing requirements of guided notes may benefit from being assigned a peer helper from the class with whom they can meet at the end of the lecture. The peer helper reviews the student's notes to ensure that each section contains complete and accurate information about the day's lecture content.

Steps in Implementing This Intervention:

Step 1: Prepare Guided Notes. Instructor can follow these guidelines to develop useful guided notes:

- Adopt a consistent set of organizational cues (e.g., blanks, asterisks, bullets) to alert students about where, when, and how many concepts to record
- Try to strike a balance between an overly simplified fill-in-the-blank format (the student just fills in the occasional blank) and one that is extremely open-ended (the student must construct large stretches of notes independently).
- As your class becomes more proficient at note-taking, you can gradually 'fade' the use of guided notes by providing less pre-formatted notes-content and requiring that students write a larger share of the notes on their own.
- You can boost the effectiveness of guided notes (or indeed any note-taking strategy) by including additional incentives or follow-up activities to monitor student note-completion and study of notes.

Step 2: Use Notes & Provide Student Feedback: When guided notes are first introduced, you will probably want to collect completed notes at the end of class to check them for completion and accuracy. Or you may have students exchange notes at the conclusion of a lecture and briefly rate the accuracy and completeness of their classmates' notes. Another approach is to have the students routinely check their own notes, following a simple checklist (e.g., "Have I filled in every blank on the guided-notes sheet with an appropriate word or phrase? If not, how can I find the appropriate information to write down?").

As another accommodation for students of diverse abilities, the instructor might prepare several versions of guided notes. Students who find note-taking most challenging would be given a version of guided-notes that requires relatively little writing, while more skilled note-takers could have a version of notes that call for the student to record and synthesize a greater amount of lecture information.

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Tools to Build Student Text and Lecture Comprehension

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A major challenge for teachers is to ensure that students truly comprehend the information that they read in textbooks or have presented in lectures. Poor students are often 'passive' learners' who use very few strategies to promote their understanding of difficult material.



Several strategies are presented below that can help students become more active and independent managers of their own learning. Instructors using any of these techniques should remember, however, that the strategies are only effective if the student has truly mastered their use. When introducing a particular technique to students, the instructor should first demonstrate several examples for the class. Using a 'think-aloud' approach, the instructor can take students through the examples, for instance, allowing the students to hear his or her thought processes are at every stage of the strategy as the instructor creates a graphic organizer of an article on an overhead transparency. When students

appear to understand the approach, they should be given opportunities to try additional examples, with the instructor circulating through the room to give feedback about their performance. Once students show that they are able to use the approach successfully, they can then be allowed to use it independently. However, the instructor should also monitor proficient students to verify that they continue to use the techniques correctly over time.

The four student strategies presented below include graphic organizers, multi-step text review, expository self-questioning, and note-taking self-questioning.

Graphic Organizers:

Teachers often have students use graphic organizers as a means of graphically representing the relationship between ideas and facts in expository text. Graphic organizers typically resemble flow-charts, with geometric shapes, or cells. Each cell contains an important fact or concept, sometimes with a graphic or picture added. Horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines link the cells together and represent the logical relationships between the ideas or concepts that the cells contain.

Hints for using graphic organizers: Students seem to retain information more effectively from a graphic organizer if exposed to them after, rather than before, reading a text selection.

- Students may come to over-rely on instructor-created graphic organizers and should be encouraged when appropriate to learn how to create their own graphic organizers independently when reading new expository text. For example, one study (Darch, et al., 1986) found that students using graphic organizers had superior recall on narrowly focused tests that specifically tested what was taught in the classroom but that these students did less well when given global tests for which they had not had the opportunity to study in advance using graphic organizers.

- Having pairs or groups of students create graphic organizers of assigned expository text can be a powerful use of cooperative learning.
- Exceptional student examples of graphic organizers can be posted in the classroom for all children to use as reference tools.

Multi-Step Text Review:

Students can increase their comprehension of expository text by following a strategy of previewing headings, posing questions about the content, and reading the. This preview/review process, sometimes referred to as SQ3R, has the following steps

1. The student first reads all headings and subheadings in the selection. This simple preview provides the student with a general mental map of the main topic items.
2. The student reads each subheading, looks up and recites it from memory, then looks back at the subheading to ensure that it was read correctly. Subheadings are explicit markers of important topics or concepts. The cycle of reading each subheading, reciting it, and then checking the accuracy of the recital helps to embed the fact or concept into the student's memory.
3. The student thinks of several important questions about each subheading. By proposing anticipatory questions, the student takes an active role in preparing to understand the content of the text.
4. The student reads the body of the text and locates key information. While reading the text selection, the student looks for answers to the questions that he or she posed in the previous step and identifies other information that appears to be important.
5. The student again reads the subheadings and refers to the text to answer questions for each heading. After re-reading each heading, the student scans the section to locate answers to questions that he or she had posed and notes other important information.
6. The student rehearses the text. The student strengthens the memorization of key points by reading each subheading again, covering the passage associated with the heading, and recalling from memory all relevant information associated with each subheading. The student then again checks to passage to make sure that he or she has not overlooked a central point.
7. (Optional) The student rereads the entire passage.

Hints for using the multi-step text review: This review process has a number of steps that require a student to be self-motivated. To help less-motivated learners, a peer or adult tutor or parent can be trained in the process and provide support, encouragement, and feedback to the student as he or she completes the review process.

Expository Text: Self-Questioning:

Struggling students may become 'inactive learners' when given expository text to read. Unlike better or more experienced readers, these less-skilled students may not apply many comprehension strategies to text and thus obtain only a limited grasp of its content.

A student-directed reading comprehension technique that can boost comprehension is self-questioning. Whenever a student reads a new passage, he or she follows five steps:

1. The student answers the question "For what purpose are you studying this passage?" with a self-reminder that he or she is reading the passage in order to answer key questions about its content.

2. The student locates all main ideas in the passage and underlines or highlights them.
3. For each main idea that the student highlighted, he or she generates a question.
4. The student reads through the passage again to answer each question that he or she generated.
5. The student reviews all main ideas, questions, and answers in the passage.

Student Notes: Self-Questioning Review:

Lecture with note-taking is virtually a universal means for teachers to convey information to students,

Table 1: Self-Questioning 'Stems' (from King, 1992)

Explain why... (Explain how...)

What is the main idea of ...?

How would you use ... to ...?

What is a new example of ...?

What do you think would happen if ...?

What is the difference between ... and ...?

How are ... and ... similar/different?

What conclusions would you draw about ...?

How does ... affect ...?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of ...?

What is the best ... and why?

How is ... related to ... that we studied earlier?

particularly in middle and high school. Students vary, however, in their ability to review notes efficiently, identify the main lecture points, and memorize this content. One review strategy that has demonstrated its value is self-questioning review. The student is trained to review notes from a lecture and - using question 'stems' similar to those in Table 1 (King, 1992)-to generate a series of questions relevant to the lecture content. Then the student returns to the lecture notes to attempt to answer this series of self-generated questions.

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